

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 20 of First Extraordinary Session

By Ford J

A RESOLUTION to honor and commemorate the Africans who died in the Middle Passage.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to honor those who have made exemplary contributions to the history of our great state and this nation; and

WHEREAS, the Tennessee Black Caucus desires to lead the citizenry of Tennessee in commemorating the Africans who died in the Middle Passage; and

WHEREAS, the Middle Passage signifies the journey of millions of Africans sold or taken from their native land by slave traders across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World to suffer more than 2 centuries of enslavement; and

WHEREAS, African men, women and children were often chained and wedged horizontally in the cargo spaces of slave ships to assure that slave traders carried the largest cargo possible; and

WHEREAS, it is estimated that between 10 and 100 million Africans died in the Middle Passage as the result of epidemics, starvation, suicide, mutiny and murder by ship crews; and

WHEREAS, despite the immense loss of African lives, millions survived the Middle Passage tragedy to endure the horrors of slavery; and

WHEREAS, the Middle Passage was an African holocaust that should remain etched in the hearts and minds of all Americans to ensure that no such atrocity reoccurs in human history; and

WHEREAS, the pain and devastation of the institution of slavery should not be a source of shame for African Americans, but instead a source of pride of all Americans for the artisans, craftsman, agriculturists, teachers and skilled workers stolen from their homelands to help build this nation we proudly proclaim as the United States; and

WHEREAS, the Tennessee Black Caucus desires to commemorate and pay homage to those Africans whose lives were lost in the Middle Passage by planting an oak tree on the southwest lawn of the Tennessee State Capitol along with a plaque describing this painful aspect of African American history in a positive light of reverence. The oak tree will serve as a representation of the strength and resilience of the African people; and

WHEREAS, as the state of Tennessee was a slave-holding state in the antebellum south, commemoration of the Middle Passage and those who died would serve as a symbol of remembrance and respect; and

WHEREAS, this commemoration would benefit the psychological welfare of the Tennessee population, which has been adversely affected by the occurrence of the institution of slavery and is concurrent with a national memorial statute which will be dropped in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean this year, with a replica of the statute being placed on the shores of the Atlantic in New York City; and

WHEREAS, it is imperative that the citizenry of this state and country gain an appreciation of the rich history of all cultures that have contributed to this great nation; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONCURRING, That we hereby honor those Africans who died during the Middle Passage and commemorate their strength and resilience.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we support the Tennessee Black Caucus in the planting of an oak tree along with a plaque on the lawn of the Tennessee State Capitol as a symbol of remembrance and respect.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.